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GODWIN, LINDA JOYCE. Pocket Change. (1973) Directed by:  
Prof. Fred Chappell. Pp. 57

The poems, songs and short prose of this collection are intended to explore a wide range of human experiences from birth to death, rage to calm, and, of course, love to hate. The styles are many and various as are the experiences one life encounters - physically, emotionally and intellectually.

POCKET CHANGE  
"

This thesis is approved by the following  
committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The  
University of North Carolina at Greensboro,

by

Linda Joyce Godwin  
"

A Thesis Submitted to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Fine Arts

Thesis Committee

Greensboro  
1973

Approved by

Fred Chappell  
Thesis Adviser

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks go foremost to Heather Miller without whose "vile woman" reading I would never have come to speak these words. This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I am indebted to her for her genuine concern and incisive grasp of the words I meant but sometimes did not use.

My thanks also go to Dr. James Helgeson for helping me find my own sense of completion and intellectual integrity.

I am grateful to Dr. Robert Watson for the forum for ideas and poems which he kindly provided.

To Blanche, Charlie and Maude, I am grateful. Their supportive words and presence were essential to the completion of this work.

Thesis Adviser

Fud Chappell

Finally, this work is for Gari who taught me to have purpose and to

Thesis Committee

James C. Helgeson

Robert Watson

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## TALK

## POEMS

scarp and through the pipes  
 one to won gingham  
 aesthetic gingham  
 through only through  
 the half-flat ball  
 on tangle knot and knot  
 all with bare

## II

up worth to rest and yllod  
 tail he-most and eval stat  
 last bedrocks are  
 like a bed to stand and  
 sloot to flat and  
 notmanance and  
 advice and

## III

resin gingham tat tears a  
 and had eikins eyes and  
 and for know and  
 Beauty Co.  
 good to good  
 was a and  
 would beal through glass windows  
 work not timentary knots and  
 electrostatic  
 and and and and and  
 they put the money and the  
 tight to good and and  
 color  
 eye and and

## IV

note tips and tips  
 and for timentary knots and  
 I have no dignity  
 no waiting power  
 no time

## TALK

## I

steam knocks through the pipes  
laughing now at our  
clamoring subtleties  
we touch only through  
the half-flat soccer ball  
you clown and knock against me  
hard with all

## II

Dolly drinks water to throw up  
fats leave the stomach last  
are absorbed last  
she wants to be a rail  
we talk of fools  
and consummation  
amino acids

## III

a sweet fat bleeding ulcer  
Anne says Frankie has one  
Anne works for Vanda  
Beauty Co.  
door to door  
has a son  
who sticks his hand through glass windows  
she had shock treatment you know  
electrodes  
she misses bingo and free candy  
they put the money for cokes  
beside the door at night  
colon  
I twisted my eye

## IV

split pea    split atom  
she must have much contempt for me  
I have no dignity  
no waiting power  
no time



too much need of them all  
 sad little pimp for myself  
 losing my laughing  
 losing my clown face  
 they don't trust the other one  
 they think I make fun of them  
 I make serious of myself  
 little Linda silly  
 'lovely Lyca lay'  
 I can bear my pain  
 I am the wall  
 I am the wall

V

my mother loves me finally free  
 I love her finally  
 my grandma loves to fish  
 and feed me myself  
 fish mouth  
 eyes wide with lust  
 to breathe the water  
 fish

## YESSES

showers make bulging feet and trickles down my breasts.  
 I holster my hands, afraid to say knees  
 in case they are really knobby or calloused or water.  
 Marry my mouth and I will be a virgin-clown,  
 red-lipped and white-eyed and void of smiles  
 whisper whisper  
 blink softly your yesses  
 I can bear my part  
 I am the wall  
 climb me

my toes with the blue?  
 I have long hair  
 and sit all day in cane chairs.

Perhaps my cane chairs  
 could hold you too. Shall  
 I tie up my hair  
 so you can come across  
 my shadow? Bathe yourself in blue.  
 Splash.

Splash.  
 Spinning touches sit lax in my cane chairs;  
 crazy handstands and blue.  
 Dipping ducks halve themselves. Shall  
 I play tunes for you on their feathers? Across  
 fading grass, my hair

is spread thin. My hair  
 is memorized in a lily splash  
 across  
 green eyes and cane chairs.  
 My shoelaces are knotted. Shall  
 I untie my blue?

Compressed inside my eyes is blue;  
 and you. Perhaps if my hair  
 were soft? Shall  
 I consider the twittering splash  
 of Orion against my cane chairs?  
 You spilled the stars across

my lap. Blue. Splash.  
 Should I loose my hair against my cane chairs?  
 Your shadow bridge -- Shall I come across?

## SESTINA I

kaleidoscopes blaze candle winks across  
 my shadow. Blink ... blink, iced blue  
 brown cane chairs  
 stare blankly at my hair  
 and crazy daisies splash  
 dash down my back. Shall

I come down to you? Shall  
 I run across  
 your bridge and splash  
 my toes with the blue?  
 I have long hair  
 and sit all day in cane chairs.

Perhaps my cane chairs  
 could hold you too. Shall  
 I tie up my hair  
 so you can come across  
 my shadow? Bathe yourself in blue.  
 Splash.

Splash.  
 Spinning touches sit lazy in my cane chairs;  
 crazy handstands and blue.  
 Dipping ducks halve themselves. Shall  
 I play tunes for you on their feathers? Across  
 fading grass, my hair

is spread thin. My hair  
 is memorized in a lily splash  
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 My shoelaces are knotted. Shall  
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Compressed inside my eyes is blue;  
 and you. Perhaps if my hair  
 were soft? Shall  
 I consider the twittering splash  
 of Orion against my cane chairs?  
 You spilled the stars across

my lap. Blue. Splash.  
 Should I loose my hair against my cane chairs?  
 Your shadow bridge -- Shall I come across?

## MY FATHER'S POCKET CHANGE

severed from the loose jangle of my father's pocket change,  
I don't know quite which way to lean.  
I mean to utterly succumb  
but I stumble so strongly.

if I cling a bit too eagerly to your sleeve,  
it is only because I wish I could be weak  
without fainting for a change.  
that proves nothing for me now you know.

with hard-nosed spit,  
I extinguish you.

## TO MY FATHER, DYING YOUNG

rise from this dust  
and still I will look at you in disbelief  
I am moored against my single limping mouth,  
I speak, at any rate, in haikus,  
quaintly.  
so you consume yourself  
so it's not me  
I am not consumed  
I am sputtered against and sputtering:  
with hard-nosed spit,  
I extinguish you.

## SNOW

elastic disappear slowly  
 bump bump six point star  
 bumpbump I breathe you wholly  
 from my head and need your quiet  
 my eyes: for my sometimes winking candlelight

you made me hot underneath my skin  
 I shine your sneer  
 and sneer your shining, caught up, Missed spleen

dying Mother Mary  
 hold my bumping head  
 in your sweating, enigmatic palm

psalms calm only Jesus now

OLD HONEY AND LOVERS  
SONG

elastic coughs sputter  
bump bump  
bumpbumpbumpbump  
from my head pulled sideways  
my eyes: tea stained cups

you made me hot underneath my skin  
I shine your sneer  
and sneer your shining, caught up, hiccuped spleen

dying Mother Mary  
hold my bumping head  
in your sweating, enigmatic palm

psalms calm only Jesus now

## OLD MOVIES AND LOVERS

cuckoo, nestle in my hair;  
 butter against my skin.  
 black-tipped nails etch happily  
 on my shellacked woodgrain  
 capitulate capitulate

the Bell & Howell burns my face  
 into flickering Belmondos,  
 grimacing in my own mirror eyes.  
 my thumb makes love to my bottom lip;  
 eyeschoke and cough on cigarette smoke:  
 cuckoo peep peep  
 capitulate

## II

I sleep my sleep in anger more than despair  
 I am decomposed  
 I am naked against myself  
 I am childless  
 I am untouched  
 I am decomposed

## III

I complain against you Orion  
 you have left me stranded  
 in the sweat-stained dark;  
 only your arrows pierce holes  
 in the black crinkled foil  
 of this Mary Magdalene night

## IV

ah brown sounds outside  
 my pursed lips mouth  
 kiss my eyes  
 and smooth my cheek with yours  
 make the softness my insides  
 let my skin feel finally dressed  
 in your fingertips



## FOUR FLUSH

## I

I am a broken coiled platinum wire  
twisting inside to out  
warming and melting  
and stinging with cold.  
I am warmed by the cold wind;  
I finally hold myself  
sitting, knees tight against my chin  
hugged at last into one piece

## II

I sleep my sleep in anger more than despair  
I am decomposed  
I am naked against myself  
I am childless  
I am untouched  
I am decomposed

## III

I complain against you Orion  
you have left me stranded  
in the sweat-stained dark;  
only your arrows pierce holes  
in the black crinkled foil  
of this Mary Magdalene night

## IV

ash brown sounds outside  
my pursed lips mouth  
kiss my eyes  
and smooth my cheek with yours  
make the softness my insides  
let my skin feel finally dressed  
in your fingertips

## LYBURN SUMMER DAY

I stand on my busted-spring mattress  
chin pushing through my arms and  
to the window sill's sharpness  
eyes pouring over the unfailing ambiguity of this rain  
beads of ice-sparkles shatter on my roof  
burst crystals from saloon chandeliers

with my stories and funny faces  
you must touch me soon to break this tallow skin  
that I have said myself to you anyway  
and you look down through me  
and contain all of me  
and I am breathless in your canyon

## LYBESS'S BIRTHDAY

captured against your sudden smile  
I am caught opening my mouth and  
stopping - soundless  
we sit smoking quietly on the rock near your house  
and I don't say myself because  
I am thinking to entertain you  
with my stories and funny faces  
and then it breaks across your face  
that I have said myself to you anyway  
and you look down through me  
and contain all of me  
and I am breathless in your canyon

## MY LILY CAT

there are knots in her stomach now  
 she sits not sleeping  
 seeing nothing but her babies  
 she folds her paws like a muffed Russian girl  
 her face is quiet and full of her mysteries  
 her growing belly swelled with young

she paced and turned to study my face  
 then squarely faced me  
 stretched her front paws to meet my arm  
 in one sweeping glide of her still graceful body

## II

four soft, wet searchers came  
 she turned her head to me  
 but I could only whisper nonsense

she took them all away from me  
 and I followed lamely from a distance  
 I watched her count their smallness over and over  
 and hoard it for herself  
 she taught them well  
 they drew back  
 peering on hind legs  
 spread their hands wide and spit contempt

## III

the smallest was the one who knew me  
 but I saw the one too late  
 we came and the one lay still  
 his mashed face and half-open mouth  
 his frozen fear

## IV

scared and dead  
 and scared  
 and dead  
 and the salt in my mouth  
 and the rain  
 the shovel's broken handle  
 the rocks and hard sand

## AFTER BIRTH

## I

she hummed  
 I stroked her head  
 the soft fur  
 her growing belly swelled with young

she paced and turned to study my face  
 then squarely faced me  
 stretched her front paws to meet my arm  
 in one swooping glide of her still graceful body

## II

four soft, wet searchers came  
 she turned her head to me  
 but I could only whisper nonsense

she took them all away from me  
 and I followed lamely from a distance  
 I watched her count their smallness over and over  
 and hoard it for herself  
 she taught them well  
 they drew back  
 rearing on hind legs  
 spread their hands wide and spit contempt

## III

the smallest was the one who knew me  
 but I saw the one too late  
 we came and the one lay still  
 his mashed face and half-open mouth  
 his frozen fear

## IV

scared and dead  
 and scared  
 and dead  
 and the salt in my mouth  
 and the rain  
 the shovel's broken handle  
 the rocks and hard sand

and I hated the boy for saying  
 the garbage, put him in the garbage  
 because of the shovel and rain and hardness  
 and because he was scared and dead  
 and so near was I too

in the back room today  
 everybody's talking  
 he tells me secrets  
 eyes on faces a peak not me  
 I never let him see my face  
 he tells me  
 (he's in love with me)  
 because he told me to call me baby  
 because he told me to keep his hands off me)  
 he says can you keep a secret  
 I have a rare disease  
 that's why I write so shaky  
 sometimes I just shake  
 it's a secret  
 even my wife won't know  
 you will tell me  
 he picks his nose with his muddied fingers  
 can you keep a secret  
 listen, I have a theory  
 I was born late  
 you know, I was trying to get finished  
 this hand didn't make it  
 muddied fingers  
 would have been normal too  
 my doctor got drafted  
 World War II you know  
 that was war  
 now there was a war for you  
 yes  
 he pulls his sweatband from between his cheeks  
 listen  
 my wife, she's direct blood from Thomas Wolfe, you know  
 did I tell you about what my daughter wrote  
 I'll bring it for you to read  
 once again  
 hello sweet thing  
 fine as wine  
 yes sir yes  
 would you be so kind

## THE MANAGER

he sits on the toilet for thirty minutes at the time  
we found True Confessions  
in the back room today  
everybody wasn't surprised  
he tells me secrets  
can you keep a secret he says  
I never do  
he tells me  
(he's in love with me  
because I told him not to call me baby  
because I told him to keep his hands off me)  
he says can you keep a secret  
I have a rare disease  
that's why I write so shaky  
sometimes my hand just shakes  
it's a secret  
even my wife doesn't know  
you won't say anything will you  
he picks his nose with his nubbed fingers  
can you keep a secret  
listen, I have a theory  
I was born late  
you know, I was trying to get finished  
this hand didn't make it  
webbed fingers  
would have been normal too  
my doctor got drafted  
World War II you know  
that was our war  
now there was a war for you  
yes  
he pulls his underwear from between his cheeks  
listen  
my wife, she's direct blood from Thomas Wolfe, you know  
did I tell you about what my daughter wrote  
I'll bring it for you to read  
nose again  
hello sweet thing  
fine as wine  
yes sir yes sir  
and twice as you know

## CRAM IT

grind I am cold-nosed turning corners  
 the my calloused ass aches of touches  
 we sing fourscore and seven  
 sexy feels in dime store aisles  
 brush 'hey baby, I'd eat yours anytime.'  
 layer sweet cunt swings low and wide  
 we across the aftershave and popcorn smell

stand of course, I'd never saw yours off  
 the but wouldn't I like to try.

the henkey took place player stands feet  
 in time to chewing gum snacks and high note trills,  
 looks and in us see to humor school

we still smiling still. funeral how fast  
 slow sweep in eked pale  
 new die night has narrow tail, a zig-zag

gather 'splayed ed to throat with ta-rah-tah  
 dealer next has won glacial eyes. Gals and  
 high has knith we thined, and sigh.



## SUNDAY OFF

grinding gears up the dirt mountain road,  
the engine spits against unsure clutching and gas.  
we wind ourselves up to the door of Jesus Saves,

brush dust from clean Sunday dresses;  
layers gathered as we took the turns, windows down.  
we smile wide, clean-toothed smiles at men

standing outside; say we are from  
the camp across the mountain.  
they pump our hands again and again

the honkey tonk piano player stamps her feet  
in time to chewing gum smacks and high note trills,  
looks around to see us in and seated.

we are smiling still. funeral home fans  
slap backs of pews while  
young girls, fat women and thin old men

gather at the front to be today's choir  
and sing, eyes closing now and then raised  
to the roof, beyond we think, and sigh.

my hand moving before myself  
drawing back in fear of the death I had given  
his staring eye (I should not shut)  
glaring about the shout of his open-frozen back  
knowing at once - at once

## SPARROW

cold when I found him hovering  
beside the window beneath the ledge  
of dripping rain and early morning cold

so light and still when I lifted him  
placed him inside the big pocket  
of my hooded rubber coat

pushing aspirined-bread down his  
swollen throat, not knowing  
his neck was broken

spooning water that he sputtered and  
fought to save himself from  
saying aloud to myself and him and all

'stubborn bird - ungrateful - drink'

turning for smaller things to  
push bread down his unwilling throat  
sure only of my Hypocratic hands

then touching him  
my hand knowing before myself  
drawing back in fear of the death I had given

his staring eye (I could not shut)  
glaring aloud the shout of his open-frozen beak  
knowing at once - at once

## PIGEON MAN

he is the pigeon man  
the word on his cart is peanuts  
it is incidental.  
the fat pigeons of the State Capitol  
know him for what he is  
they flutter to the ledge of his shoulders  
sit proudly on his head  
flap to keep their balance  
he leans carefully over his tin feeder  
pulls out a handful of peanuts  
nobody has paid him a dime for  
stretches his prize to the waiting beaks.  
from across the street I am smiling  
he sees me quickly  
waves his pigeon arms  
folding in the caresses

## LATER MORNING FOG

counterfeited consciously against the light,  
the air has snowed upon itself this fog;  
see, now the paper trees fold back  
in fifth-grade shadow boxes.

red watered eyes, blink out the dry leaf smoke,  
the dust that was our yard;  
I count the seasons quietly now  
and loose my tongue to silence,  
peel the sky from my bare throat  
to say nothing, nothing

not out for their hour lunch,  
they mouth the water graciously,  
open shut  
jaw swinging on a wooden pivot  
they move to the next corner,

## LOTUS HOUSE RESTAURANT

the great lumbering fish,  
swollen in the tank,  
crowd each other for company I think.  
through soft-eyed black  
and peering cat-eye tails,  
they see the fidgeting lunchers  
and slide on feather fins  
against the clamor;  
on purpose,  
they are aristocratic ladies  
with double chins.  
not out for their hour lunch,  
they mouth the water graciously.  
open shut  
jaw swinging on a wooden pivot  
they move to the next corner.

## POEM

some days I can see right through your eyes  
I am so weary of words  
I want your consciousness to seep inside my head  
I want to be the deep soft grass  
    underneath the scuppernong vines

## YOU HAVE WON

## SONGS

Refrain

so. you have won.  
it was easy too,  
you just lasted till the end  
of the dream you made.

and what of me?  
am I your dreamer still?  
can I stop the light you hollowed  
out of rib and dust:  
the lust you swallowed whole  
to cleanse your hands of me

come out. see the mask  
you made to hide behind;  
you - full of the craze of loneliness  
you - half mad with love

and now you say  
with that sad sneer you put on  
"the Fall, the Sin."  
liar liar liar  
you knew it all  
before we began

## YOU HAVE WON

Refrain

so. you have won.  
it was easy too.  
you just lasted till the end  
of the dream you made.

and what of me?  
am I your dreamer still?  
can I stop the light you hollowed  
out of rib and dust:  
the lust you swallowed whole  
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you - full of the craze of loneliness  
you - half mad with love

and now you say  
with that sad sneer you put on  
'the Fall, the Sin."  
liar liar liar  
you knew it all  
before we began



Guitar Intro

Refrain

Voice

so you have won—

it was e - - - - - ea - sy

too you just last-ed to the

end of the dream you

made and what of me am

I your dream -- er still can I stop the light you hot loved out of

rib and dust the lust -- you swallowed whole --

to cleanse -- your hands of me

come out -- see the

mask you made — — to hide be-hind

you

full of the craze — — of lone-li-ness

you

half

The musical score is written on five systems, each consisting of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The vocal line is in treble clef, and the piano accompaniment is in bass clef. The music is in 7/8 time, indicated by the '7' over the first measure of each system. The lyrics are written below the vocal line. The first system has the lyrics 'mask you made — — to hide be-hind'. The second system has the lyrics 'you'. The third system has the lyrics 'full of the craze — — of lone-li-ness'. The fourth system has the lyrics 'you'. The fifth system has the lyrics 'half'. The piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note pattern in the left hand and a more complex melody in the right hand, often featuring triplets and slurs.

mad - - - with love

and now you say with that sad sneer you put on

'the Fall - - - the Sin' Li-ar - - -

Li-ar - - - Li-ar - - - you know it all

be- fore - - - we be-gan

[Repeat Refrain]

Guitar

The musical notation consists of three systems. The first system has two staves: a vocal staff with a treble clef and a guitar staff with a treble clef. The guitar staff contains a series of eighth notes with upward stems, and the vocal staff contains a series of eighth notes with downward stems. The second system also has two staves, continuing the same rhythmic pattern. The third system has a guitar staff with a treble clef and a bass staff with a bass clef. The guitar staff contains a series of eighth notes with upward stems, and the bass staff contains a series of eighth notes with downward stems. The notation is handwritten and appears to be a sketch or a first draft.

Five sets of empty musical staves, each consisting of a single staff line, arranged vertically. These are likely intended for additional musical notation or lyrics.

## CRAZY LADY

Refrain

crazy lady  
keep your bottle on  
move your nightmares slowly  
through my head

the air changes quickly this year  
and catches me looking through your eyes  
to lightless days of cordless spoken  
breaks in us

tonight I breathe the coolness  
through my skin  
and hum tunes that  
tap and thump at us  
through the wall

it's not the orange juice tea  
or lentil soup you make  
that thrashes past my window in your name  
but all the sleep-filled fingertips  
you press into my curving spine  
and mumble through my hair

Refrain

Voice

Guitar

Cra -

a -

a - z - y la - a - dy

ke

-ep your bot-tle on



Handwritten musical score on page 34, featuring five systems of music. Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment line (bass clef). The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 7/8. The lyrics are written below the vocal line.

move your right-moes slow-ly through my head

the air chan-ges quick-ly this

year and catch-es me look-ing through your

eyes to light - - - less days of

cond-less spok-en breaks in us



[Repeat Refrain - Once Through Only]

to-night I breathe the coolness of your skin and

hum tunes that tap and thump at us through the wall it's

not the orange juice tea or lentil soup you make that

threshes past my win-dow in your name but

all the sleep - filled fin - ger tips you press in - to my

curv - ing spine and num - ble through my

hair

[Repeat Refrain once through  
softly]

DEAD

## SHORT PROSE

If I don't look at him, he won't be dead. The man from the store said he was, but it was a bad joke. They were trying to make me think it so I'd love mama. It won't work. I won't talk to her. She knows nothing. He knows - daddy - we know everything together. And we laugh at the boy at the ballgame who yanks the foot tub full of ice after him and says- liice-cooold drinks. He went yesterday to work and I didn't get up in time to see him and he came back after I was in bed and then the man from the store came and got me, right while we were hanging up at the barn. Black and sticky and saked too thick, I add my hands everyday to the gum ball that's as big as a walnut now. and he says, "Your mother asked me to pick you up." And I know he means my daddy, not mama. And we drive into town slow and he doesn't talk at all until we're almost there and then he looks from under his eyes at me and says, "Your mother said not to tell you, but your daddy's dead." And I turn away from him to the window and push the vent open wider and smile at his foolishness and am worried for him, because it's not a funny joke. And then all the people are at my house and I walk in gummy and barefoot and they run to me and hug me and cry and they make me cry too, but it's for them. And the preacher's wife holds me tight and cries quietly not like the rest and I like her crying for me. The men stand around

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holding their hands in front of them or ball them up in their pockets and don't look at me at all. I look all around and cry hard for them because they are so sad and don't know that it's a mistake. And my mother is lying on the bed right in front of them, not even caring that they're all looking at her and she holds her arms out to me and pleads with her screwed up mouth and I hate her for playing this too.

I turn around and go to my room and pick out clean shorts and underwear and lock myself in the bathroom and wash quickly because I don't like all those people around when I'm sitting there naked in the water. And somebody knocks on the door and makes the blood rush to my head so fast that I sit up straight in the tub. And then there's a voice, the preacher's wife I think, saying, "Honey, your mother said to put on this dress." I jump from the tub and stand way back behind the door, unlock it and open it just enough to get my hand through and keep it there until I feel the cloth in it. Then I jerk it in and close the door and lock it. It's a Sunday dress. That's just for when we have to look nice. She know it's not true. He's not dead. It's to make them come and look at her crying on the bed.

I dress and stand in front of the mirror and daddy looks back at me; worried, wrinkled between his eyes and I smile inside my chest and think of me and my brother standing in our yard pretending to hit each other like the cowboys

did and then we'd jump back like we'd been hit. And daddy, down at Mr. Jimmy's, jumped in the car and drove back fast to tell my brother to stop beating me up. And we laughed and laughed and he was confused and shy and yelled at us anyway and told us not to do it anymore because it was probably dangerous.

I unlock the bathroom door and go in the room where my mother still lies on the bed crying and somebody touches me on the shoulders and guides me over toward her. I sit down on the side of the bed and her arms grab me and pull me down to her fretting face. I have never seen her cry before and it makes her ugly and loose-skinned and old. I pull away because I have to look at her some more and she says, "Your daddy \_\_\_\_" And I look across the bed and see my Sunday School teacher who knows that I am God's own chosen One and I say, looking at her all the time, "God will take care of him." But I don't believe it for a minute. Even if he were really what they say, he would go to hell because he always says he is tired and has to rest when mama tries to get him to go with us to church. But I see my Sunday School teacher wipe her eyes and I know that I've said the right thing. But my mother still whimpers and says, "But we'll miss him so much." She is lying. She knows he can't be dead.



I pull away from her clutching and go in the kitchen and sit on the high, yellow stool beside the stove and watch the preacher's wife and some other women finish the pickles my mother has been making and the whole house is sharp and pinches up your nose with the smell. I look in the big pressure cooker and see all the softening cucumbers and I think of the dead baby kittens that were taken from their mother's stomach too soon that are in the jars in the vet's office and I see daddy's worried, wrinkled-between-the-eyes face and I am cold all over when I think that if he were what they say - dead - they might do that to him too and even though I know he can't be, I feel heat go up my face and run out the back porch door because the pinching smell is going to make me vomit if I don't quit looking at the bubbling spice seeds.

I run outside to the little sassafras tree that grows in our backyard and sit right down in the dirt beside it in my Sunday dress and everything. My mama would yell at me for that if she knew. I look over at the porch and see the preacher's wife standing there against the screen watching me, but she doesn't come out, just wipes her wet hands on the dish towel and pushes at her hair. I turn away from her and jerk a leaf from the tree and split it with my thumb nail and stick it up to my nose to smell the root beer on my fingers and then I crush it all up in my hands and smear the juice

all over my face and hands to get rid of the pinching pickle smell. I wish daddy would come home soon and make all those people go away so I could go back inside to my room.

I stay outside crushing the leaves and smearing them on my face until they come out and make me go inside because it's dark. They make me go in to my mother and she says that I have to sleep next door at Buck's so my Aunt Rochelle can sleep in my room and I just look at her and can't believe she hasn't told them all yet that he can't be dead. I go to my room and get my pajamas and she yells for me to take my toothbrush and I go in the bathroom and spit in the sink at her. I go over to Buck's and say I'm ready to go to sleep and they smile sadly at me and say they understand. Buck's wife makes me some warm milk, to help me sleep she says, and I taste it and it burns my tongue so I take it to the room I'm going to sleep in and leave it on the dresser beside the bed. I climb between the new sheets and smush my eyes into the pillow and can hear my daddy laughing between his teeth softly like he did when I asked him at lunch one day if he thought I might have breast cancer because I had these two lumps in my chest. He took me in the bedroom and took off my shirt and looked just like a doctor and considered carefully and said he thought I'd be okay, that I was just going to have breasts like my mother because I was a girl and I hated it and told him I wasn't either.



I wake up and don't know where I am until I see the hard cracked skin on the curdled milk on the dresser. I put on my clothes and go in the kitchen and Buck's wife makes me all the bacon and cinnamon toast I can eat and she gives me milk and says that I have to go home soon because we have to go see my daddy's body in the funeral home and I look at her through my milk glass and she is puffy and swollen and I run home fast because she believes it too.

My mother is still on the bed but she has on a Sunday dress too and we get in cars, almost everybody in the house, and I have to ride with my Uncle Donald and Wilma Gray and I hate them. And when we get to the funeral home, Uncle Donald and Wilma Gray stand on either side of me and hold my arms and I look at them sideways because they have never touched me before. And we go inside a room that looks like a little church and I think we're back in my mother's kitchen because I keep smelling the pickles. And my mother is down at the front and she is crying in wails that cut through my chest that is going to be like hers. And I see a wax dummy that they've made to look like my daddy and I pull back from Uncle Donald and Wilma Gray and won't go down to the front and I say, that's not my daddy, that's not my daddy, that's not my daddy. And if I don't look at him, he won't be dead.

## ELIZABETH

You are Elizabeth. I know that. I see your head too big for your tiny twisted body propped up on one hip. I know your grinning bumpy face squared off by your dead leaf red hair. I see your thin hands and arms covered only with skin and the arm that moves from the elbow and bangs your clumsy fist on the writing board across the wheelchair I push you in. You grin and squeal in your creaky voice and shake your stubby hair in the wind when we buy helium balloons and tie them to the chair and are our own circus. And I am cocky as hell and walk strong and talk to you just like you were a person, so that all my humanity rides with us when I tip back the chair and roll you down the curbs and up the steps to hear all the young poets read their weepings. And I swell inside with pride and say, ah, Elizabeth, you are my poem. And I know they all see it and I am a soul crier too.

Sometimes there is the good. We go down the streets and you are the crippled body I always needed and I am your legs behind, laughing and pushing and making it a carnival ride. We buy flowers and think of ways to get you upstairs to the leather shop and we squeeze between booths in restaurants and brake your chair in movie aisles and you bang your fist in delight.

But I cannot keep the nights away. And lying in the dark when we are separated by the desk partition so I cannot see your grins and red hair, you say all the things I know but don't want to know you feel. All the pulling. All the movement that only comes out through your head. And I squeeze my pillow into my mouth and then the morning comes and we wake up and both pretend that the dark hasn't come at all. And I wash your hands and face easy like a baby's and put on the undershirt to protect your sticky white skin from the hard shell brace that makes you stiff enough to sit up. I buckle it around you and you hold onto my arm and I feel too strong. And I put on your child's socks and hard brown lace-up shoes and wait while you pick out the clothes you want to wear. Then I hang the heavy straps around you and hoist you into the chair with the crane and am astounded all over again that you can be so heavy in your deadness. And then the day is grins and your tossing head and banging fist.

But then the dark comes again and I am hunched in it and cannot stop your words and silent crying retching in the night. And you say - I have loved. And I shut my ears and my brain bursts because I have seen your shriveled body that can only move if I make it. You say - we went sometimes for picnics in the woods and he told me all the things he had never said to anyone and you pierce yourself all over again

and you say - I loved him. But I am the one that feels the deep hunger in my womb. And you say - I asked him to sleep with me. And I am incredulous and my mouth will not close against the dark air. And then you weep - he laughed, he laughed at me. And I wrinkle my cheeks hard against my shut eyes. And in your silence I touch my breasts hung heavy against me and my thighs tremble and the pressure in my teeth is all the strength you don't have.

John and Crazy Lucy lived. They were Indians. My mother told me. They didn't wear feathers or anything so I didn't know for sure. Crazy Lucy was a lot older than me. Maybe eighteen. She was only four or five in her head though. My mother told me that too. I didn't know for sure about that either, even though I played with her all the time. We mostly played in the dirt and she could do that pretty good. We played in the road that ran from Mr. Peale's to John and Viak's where the dirt was loose and puffy. We'd squat and draw with big sticks. Crazy Lucy never could draw anything except the sun and she put it with a face smiling and long lines coming out from it all around. I kept telling her that it wasn't like that really. She never would listen to anything I'd say.

Sometimes she'd play with me and the twins, but not much. The twins always wanted to play Gattie and you had to throw dice and know what they meant and put things together and that made her scared a little. She hated those ugly

and you say - I loved him. But I am the one that feels the deep hunger in my womb. And you say - I asked him to sleep with me. And I am incredulous and my mouth will not close against the dark air. And then you weep - he laughed, he laughed at me. And I wrinkle my cheeks hard against my shut eyes. And in your silence I touch my breasts hung heavy against me and my thighs tremble and the pressure in my teeth is all the strength you don't have.

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Sometimes she'd play with me and the twins, but not much. The twins always wanted to play dolls and you had to throw dice and know what they meant and put things together and that made her scared a little. She hated those ugly

## SUN

They were round like the kind a blind man wears, but he wasn't. Blind, I mean. He wore them all the time, even in the house. I would go over to see the twins Wanda and Sanda and there he'd be, sitting there with his cane, wearing those shades. Mr. Peale was their grandpa. He never looked like any grandpas I knew. He owned the farm where Vick and John and Crazy Lucy lived. They were Indians. My mother told me. They didn't wear feathers or anything so I didn't know for sure. Crazy Lucy was a lot older than me. Maybe eighteen. She was only four or five in her head though. My mother told me that too. I didn't know for sure about that either, even though I played with her all the time. We mostly played in the dirt and she could do that pretty good. We played in the road that ran from Mr. Peale's to John and Vick's where the dirt was loose and puffy. We'd squat and draw with big sticks. Crazy Lucy never could draw anything except the sun and she put it with a face smiling and long lines coming out from it all around. I kept telling her that it wasn't like that really. She never would listen to anything I'd say.

Sometimes she'd play with me and the twins, but not much. The twins always wanted to play Cootie and you had to throw dice and know what they meant and put things together and that made her scared a little. She hated those ugly



blue legs and stick eyes anyway, so mostly she just liked to play with me in the dirt. I didn't mind much because we'd draw in the dirt next to Vick's flower garden and she had these really funny purple flowers that looked like a fuzzy feather. They were thick and stiff and sometimes when Vick, that was Crazy Lucy's mother, wasn't around, I'd break one and make her fan me like I was an Egyptian lady. She didn't like it much, but sometimes when I hadn't told her that her sun was wrong a lot, she'd do it.

Mr. Peale really scared old Crazy Lucy to death. Whenever he'd come hop-walking down the road, she'd run behind their house. Before she'd come out and draw again, I'd have to go back and tell her he was gone. He was a small man, but you knew he meant it just the way he walked, half on that cane and knocking weeds with it all the time. I don't think I ever knew a time when he didn't have snuff in his mouth. You never saw it dribble out the corner of his mouth like some old people's did, but you knew it was there all the same. Sometimes he'd come and stand in the field where John was plowing and you could see him waving his hand all around and John would just stand there with the reins around his neck nodding. John didn't talk much. Then Mr. Peale would come back up to the house and look all around and poke some more weeds. I thought he was looking for Crazy Lucy, but I wasn't sure. He'd twist his funny bird's head around quick and then

start back up the dirt road toward his house. Then I'd go get Crazy Lucy and squat back down to draw some more. But she was so scared that she'd just squat there and keep looking at the road a long time before she was sure he was gone and then she'd pick up her stick and start that smiling sun.

I remember one time when Crazy Lucy had to go to the outhouse and she made me go with her because Mr. Peale had just been and she wanted me to keep watch outside, in case he came around behind the house. I told her he'd never do that, but you couldn't tell her anything. Once she had decided, that was it. She must have stayed in there ten minutes and I was getting pretty tired of just standing around outside waiting for her because I figured she was just staying in there to hide from him anyway. Finally I opened the door and looked in to tell her I wasn't waiting anymore and she was still squatting there on top of the seat like a tree frog holding her britches up on her knees. I shut the door without saying anything to her because I had seen the hair growing right out of her. I ran past the corn to the edge of the woods and pulled down my shorts and underpants and looked hard at myself scared to death. oh my Jesus I was crazy too. I wasn't as crazy as her. It was just a fine fuzz like on my wrists, but it was there. I thought at first that I'd rather kill myself than draw crazy suns all my life, but then I decided I wouldn't tell anybody, not even Wanda



and Sanda and if I didn't go to the bathroom in front of anybody, then nobody would know.

Wanda and Sanda had this mother named Daphne. She was Mr. Peale's daughter and she cut everybody's hair. My mother called her Dap and every two weeks she'd give me seventy-five cents and send me down to have Dap cut my hair. I liked to go because I knew they had this secret thing at their house. I didn't know exactly what it was at first, but I was positive it had something to do with Alton. He was their father. He was a carpenter, too, so he was always coming home in the middle of the day, sometimes when they didn't think he was coming. I would be sitting there in agony while Daphne was cutting my hair. Nobody ever believed me, but it really hurt when people cut my hair, especially at the bottom. But I never yelled or anything because Daphne would always say how I was the best child whose hair she ever cut because I would sit so still, so I wouldn't move for anything. So I would be sitting there in agony and I'd hear this noise - somebody walking hard - and Daphne would hear it too and she would smile down at me and say for me to please excuse her a minute - very proper. And I'd say of course, being glad to have her gone a minute so I could make faces at the pain. She'd always be careful to shut the bedroom door after her and then I'd hear her whispering and the twins whispering and Alton talking loud and happy. And then I'd

hear them all scuffling past the shut door of the room I was in toward the back bedroom. Alton was always saying, "oh Dap honey, you know I love you." And then in a few minutes Daphne would come back all smiles and start whacking away at my head again. It always hurt more, my hair, after Alton had come because Daphne wasn't quite so careful then. Sometimes when I'd be over at the twins on Saturdays watching the dance show on T.V., it would happen just the same. The noise in the kitchen and Daphne shutting the door from the other side and loud, happy Alton. Wanda and Sanda never said a thing and I never said a thing either. We all just sat there laughing louder than usual and looked harder for my brother's silly serious face. He always went to the Dance Party so he could be on T.V. and he tried to look so old dancing around with his girl friend Betty Anne. Once when I was leaving their house, Alton came home and there was nothing they could do to get him to the back bedroom in time. There he was, walking in the door just when I was walking out and he pounded me on top of the head and pulled me by the sleeve out to the back yard and his sweet liquor breath kept yelling for Wanda and Sanda to come out to see the present he had made for them. We all just jumped around in amazement and old happy Alton just beamed and beamed. It was a wooden sliding board and he kept telling Daphne, while she was trying to get him inside, that he spent weeks sanding

it and that we should go tell Vick and let old Crazy Lucy slide on it too and it looked like Daphne got stiff as the sliding board for a minute, but she finally got him inside. Me and Wanda and Sanda spent the rest of the afternoon sliding down that board, but they wouldn't ever go get Crazy Lucy. It was the next year I guess that I slid down the board one Sunday and stuck that splinter so far up me that my daddy couldn't even get it out with his needle-nose pliers and the doctor had to pull it out.

One time when me and Crazy Lucy were drawing in the dirt next to her house, I saw Alton come walking down the road hopping almost just like Mr. Peale. When Crazy Lucy saw him too, she ran away behind the house and just left me there squatting in the dirt. When Alton got closer I could hear him kind of singing and saying, "Vick, sweet Vick. Come on out and see me now." John was out in the field next to the flower garden and he pulled the mule up short and was wrapping the reins slowly around the plow handle when we both saw Mr. Peale coming down the road after Alton faster than he ever walked. Vick heard the noise and looked out the front screen and then she locked it and shut the wooden door too. John was coming out of the field toward the house and I figured if Vick was scared I should be too, so I ran to the porch and hid under it behind the steps. John met Alton just before he got to the steps and I couldn't smell his liquor breath but

I knew that John's face was full of it. Alton was jabbering in his happy voice, "I wanna see Vick. sweet Vick. you can't keep me from seeing Vick no more, now. I wanna see Vick." I looked around the steps and saw John standing on the first step pushing at Alton's shoulders, keeping him back. Mr. Peale was almost right there when old Alton pushed hard at John and said, "I wanna see Vick and my girl Lucy." Mr. Peale grabbed Alton by the shoulders and spun him around hard and slapped him full in the face. I winced for Alton and cowered away from Mr. Peale just like he did. Alton started crying just like a baby and kept muttering, "She's mine, now. I got a right to see my own baby girl, ain't I? Where's my Lucy." And then I saw John go stiff and hard in the face and he turned to Mr. Peale. Even through the shades Mr. Peale couldn't meet that look and he turned away and slapped Alton again and pulled him away down the dirt road. John looked back toward the house and stood burning it with his eyes for the longest time. His teeth were against each other so hard that the muscles in his jaws stood out hard and sharp like rocks. Then, both hands balled up at his sides and he walked up the steps. He just stood there a minute and then I heard Vick unhook the screen. I couldn't hear John talking at all at first, just Vick crying soft and saying, "I couldn't help it. What could I do? He come in here drunk and you was gone to town. I couldn't do nothing, he was crazy drunk and

I couldn't do nothing." And then I heard John. "Where is she? Where's his youngun." And Vick, wild now. "She's mine too. You hear." I heard her fall hard against the floor and John say, "I'll kill you, too." Then I heard the screen door slam and John loud on the porch and I jumped back behind the steps so he wouldn't kill me, too. He came striding through the yard, his hunting gun in his hands, his body tight all over. He went out toward the shed and I didn't know nothing except that I had to find Crazy Lucy before John did. I crawled fast as I could on my hands and knees under the house to the back. I didn't see her nowhere behind the house so I checked to make sure John was in the shed and then I streaked to the outhouse, but she wasn't there either. I knew she'd gone to our place in the edge of the woods past the corn field. I peeped out the door of the toilet and then ran right through the corn to hide from John. My head was all mixed up. It didn't make sense except the part about John with the gun and him saying he was going to kill Crazy Lucy. I was holding my side in with my hand and the air was screaming through my throat all raw when I saw her squatting there by the stump drawing and her face didn't know nothing that mine did. She just smiled up at me when she saw me standing there beside her heaving my insides out. I knew then I couldn't tell her all of it because it wouldn't mean nothing but the sound of me talking to her. I just stayed



there with her drawing and talking silly stuff to her and showing her pretty weeds in the woods until it started to get dark. I figured then I could take her to my house and hide her from John. She didn't mind coming at all. She thought it was the most fun she'd ever had. We walked along the edge of the woods and then I made her run all the way to my house. I saw my mother standing out on the porch looking for me and I knew she was mad as a hen because I was home after dark. But she didn't start yelling at me when she saw Crazy Lucy and I guess she saw my scared-to-death face too. I told her John was going to kill Crazy Lucy and that he had his gun and that he was probably crazy too. I didn't tell her about Alton or Mr. Peale or hearing Vick at all. I didn't know what to say to her. She said for me just to stay there and for me and Crazy Lucy to eat supper while she and my daddy went to see Mr. Peale. I didn't think that was going to do much good but my mother was almost as stubborn as Crazy Lucy when she made up her mind.

They found Alton shot right through the head. They didn't find John nowhere. We took Crazy Lucy back to Vick's and the next week Vick took her off somewhere and I didn't see any of them anymore after that ever. Nobody could understand how a steady man like John could ever have done something like that, even if he was an Indian.



## SUMMARY

This collection of poems, songs and short prose is intended to demonstrate a growing evolution from the internalized emotional experience to the externalization and encompassing of an environment of other people, places and objects into one human experience.